

## **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON LANGUAGE AND POWER IN NEPALI PUBLIC ELT CLASSROOM**

**Chet Narayan Sapkota, M.Phil**

Madhyabindu Multiple Campus, Kawasoti

### **Abstract**

*The study focuses on how teachers use language and power to share knowledge, specifically concerning the power language used in Nepali ELT classrooms. The study's primary goals are to analyze language power as it reveals itself in speech acts and examine how teachers' use of language power affects students' attitudes toward learning. The primary source of data for this study was the teaching activities carried out in the district of Nawalparasi, Nepal. Depending on attributes including gender, job position, and length of service, four public school teachers—two male and two female—were chosen. Using a qualitative ethnographic study approach, the teacher and students' interactions and language use are examined. The data is further evaluated using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, which comprises description, interpretation, and explanation. The findings suggest that teachers are imposing speech act forms on their students and that this power may have an impact on how they feel about learning. However, students are also motivated and become more engaged in class when teachers express their pleasure in speech act forms. Therefore, teachers should incorporate humanistic teaching into their teaching and learning activities, taking into account the potential problems of using language in an ELT classroom.*

**Key Words:** *Critical discourse analysis, power, and language, learning attitude, speech acts*

### **Introduction**

Humans convey their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and facts using language. Generally speaking, oral language is more profoundly used in communication than written language. Interaction between teachers and students during teaching and learning activities is one example of language use for social roles. According to Brown (2000), language is a system of written, spoken, and arbitrarily conventionalized gestures that allow people who belong to the same group to communicate with one

another. Written language is less frequently used in communication than spoken language. That is comparable to what takes place in the classroom during interactions between students and teachers. One way that language is used for social roles in the classroom is through interactions between teachers and students during this kind of learning activity (Muhyiddin, 2018). Language serves as an interactional function in classroom learning and instruction. Bannett et. al. (2003) insisted that language in the classroom should serve

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transactional and interactive purposes. The interactional function is concerned with social interactions and personal attitudes whereas the transactional function discloses the settings. Moher and Rokas (2002) provided the three language characteristics based on how language is used in the classroom. First, there is an imbalance in the speakers' and listeners' relative positions of authority. The disparity enables the speaker to be subjugated by the participant who is using strong words. Secondly, there is also a set of predetermined language patterns. Thirdly, the conversational interchange serves to reinforce a context-dependent personal identity.

The relationship between teachers and students has an impact on how well concepts are received in the context of classroom activities. Language usage in the context of learning interactions reflects the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Fundamentally, the teacher's engagement with students reflects how they perceive their students' perspectives. Based on the concepts of the superior-subordinate relationship and the motivator and facilitator of students, teachers can observe the students. It represents the teacher's system of thought and beliefs. In other words, how a teacher communicates with students can affect how they perceive both the instructor and the subject.

A teacher's responsibility in the classroom includes both transmitting knowledge and managing the teaching and learning process. To achieve the learning objective, teachers have complete control over all

classroom activities. Teachers assess the teaching-learning process to determine how well their students have understood the lesson. The teacher can grade the students' arguments by declaring whether they are right or wrong. In other words, teachers have some control over and influence over what students do in the classroom. It is clear from the description above that teachers in the classroom are in a position of higher authority than students.

Currently, schools in Nepal are using the communicative method to teach English. Students must be able to improve their communication skills in meaningful situations. Shastri (2010) mentioned that communicative competence is the ability to develop an infinite number of sentences as well as an understanding of how to utilize language. Additionally, the ability to use language appropriately for the intended goal is referred to as communicative competence. The goal could be expressed as a form of request, order, apology, or complaint. This results in the understanding of how language is acquired. It signifies that in addition to mastering English grammar, students must also be able to effectively communicate in English in a given situation. The majority of ELT classes in Nepal are still teacher-centered, nonetheless. The teaching-learning process is still dominated by teachers.

Fairclough (1995) believed that the concept of power is understood in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are created, circulated, and consumed in certain socio-cultural contexts, as well

as asymmetries between participants in discourse events. It is believed that texts' grammar, implicatures and presuppositions, standards of politeness, speech-exchange system, generic structure, and style are all influenced by their ideological foundations. Van Dijk (2001) stated that a power group must control the number of individuals joined with others to be able to restrict the freedom of other groups that might influence their opinions.

The explicit and implicit expressions of the teachers reveal the shape of their power in the classroom. It appears in the form of acknowledgment, direction, queries, or arguments. In other words, after careful analysis, some of the teacher's utterances, such as "Keep silent," are discovered to contain the power manifestation. This is not the only instance a teacher will use this sentence to enforce the rule that students must keep quiet in class. Fairclough (2009) stated that the sentence above is likely a form of authority held by the teacher and the student if the context and linguistic components of the sentence are taken into consideration, such as the speaker-listener connection, transitivity, modus, modality, and active-passive.

It is possible to evaluate a sentence's power through linguistic features and the speaker's speech behaviors. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one approach to comprehending how power manifests in discourse that involves the use of linguistic features. It not only explains how language is used but also correlates

between it and the power possessed by a group of individuals who possess it. Language plays a significant role in critical discourse analysis when identifying social power imbalances. Text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice are the three dimensions of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2012). Understanding how power manifests in the text through language, grammar, and textual structure requires a descriptive analysis of the textual dimension. The discourse practice dimension will interpret the findings of this dimension's analysis. The next step in the investigation is to determine what the sociocultural factor explains.

The study conducted by Yanto et. al (2013) argue that the manifestation of power in the classroom has a purpose. First, it allows the teacher to govern or control the classroom; second, it compels students to pay attention to, believe in, and follow the teacher's instructions. Third, students believe in teachers' talk to make sentences, and fourth, students respect their teachers which differentiates the teachers' and students' status.

Currently, this study focuses on the power language employed in Nepali ELT classrooms. Critical discourse analysis, as Fairclough (1992) believes can be used to identify the type of power present in classroom discourse. To achieve this goal, this study focuses on how language and power are employed in English language teaching (ELT) in Nepali classrooms. It also identifies the most prevalent forms of

power used in ELT settings.

### **Problem Statement**

Language plays a significant role in critical discourse analysis when identifying social power imbalances. Text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice are the three dimensions of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2020). Understanding how power manifests in the text through language, grammar, and textual structure requires a descriptive analysis of the textual dimension. This study primarily aims to explore two issues: a) How do the forms of speech acts represent linguistic power? b) To what extent does the power of language affect students' perspectives on learning? It not only explains how language is used but also correlates between it and the power possessed by a group of individuals who possess it. The study focuses on how teachers use language and power to share knowledge, specifically concerning the power of language used in English classrooms.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study's objectives are to:

- a) Describe the power of language as it is expressed in speech acts.
- b) To explore the impact of teachers' use of power in language on students' attitudes about learning.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study of the relationship between language and power in organizational, social, and political contexts is currently

quite popular. The study of the relationship between language and power in education is, however, uncommon, particularly in ELT classrooms. In practice, interactions between students and teachers make it impossible to completely avoid the phenomenon of utilizing power in the classroom. The influence of teachers' actions or expressions on students' learning attitudes is now viewed as a source of power from a perspective in the classroom.

Additionally, teachers can use their influence to maximize students' potential by creating humanistic teaching and learning activities. Students can actively participate in the selection of instructional strategies and materials by teachers. Teachers need to encourage conversation between themselves and their students to foster a positive learning environment. The positive aspects of teachers using power in the classroom will also be a concern for the students. The students will also be aware of how student-centered learning is used in the teaching and learning process.

### **Literature Review**

This article examines how a teacher uses language to exercise power in the classroom. It is meant to show that a language's perspective may be seen in both its form and its function. In this context, language serves as a means of manifesting power. The teacher's remarks in the classroom can reveal the power structure. The speaker's speech activities take the shape of utterances. Using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis,

the power manifestations in the teachers' speech acts are analyzed.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Since language is a means of communication, human beings cannot be separated from it in their daily lives. There is interaction between the speaker and the hearer during communication. In this interaction, there is a tendency for a power imbalance between the speakers and the hearers. It can be observed by the way that one person can control the other person's speech or how they predominate in a conversation. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one approach to comprehending this disparity in language use. Van Dijk (2001) asserted that CDA is a sort of discourse analytical study that focuses largely on how social power abuse, domination, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted in the social and political context through text and talk. Bukhari and Xiaoyang (2013) believed that CDA is a field that analyzes spoken and written texts to investigate the discursive causes of power, dominance, inequality, and bias. With this conviction, CDA takes an explicit stance and seeks to comprehend, expose, and ultimately resist social inequity.

The goal of CDA is to explain the implicit and explicit relationships among language, power, and ideology to disclose identity (Kristina, 2013). To identify the discursive sources maintained and repeated within particular settings, Van Dijk (2003) explained that CDA is the field that is concerned with analyzing and examining

written and spoken texts. In a similar vein, Discourse analysis, as defined by Fairclough (1993), is the systematic examination of the frequently hidden connections between discursive practices, events, and texts and larger social and cultural structures, relations, and processes to uncover how these practices, events, and texts are influenced and formed ideologically by the relationship between power and power struggles.

The CDA can be used to explore educational issues in the context of the struggle between social reality and political power. Huckin et al. (2012) mentioned that CDA helps examine the connections between teaching, learning, curriculum, school and community roles, ideologies, and power, as well as their effects on the processes of teaching and learning in the classroom. Kristina (2013) further explained that CDA examines the unequal and hierarchical authority among participants in oral and written interactions. By critically examining language as a social activity, CDA focuses on exposing explicit and implicit sociopolitical dominance, including social transformation, power abuse, ideology imposition, and social injustice. As such, CDA is a sort of discourse analytical research that focuses on how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality occur as well as how these forces are enacted, replicated, and resisted through texts and talks in educational, social, and political contexts.

The researcher's main area of interest in this study is Norman Fairclough's

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critical discourse analysis. Fairclough (2005) mentioned that CDA has provided educational academics with methods for examining language use in social contexts. The CDA offers chances to think about the relationships between discourse and society, between texts and settings, and between language and power by challenging the assuredness of language and permitting exploration of how texts reflect the world in particular ways according to special interest (Fairclough, 2001)

In 1989, Fairclough developed the CDA approach as a critical linguistic study of language and power. Fairclough asserts that speech can be considered from three perspectives to achieve CDA's objectives. First, the text, whether it be written or spoken; second, the discourse practice; and third, the sociocultural practices; the context of society, institution, and culture that determine the meaning and form of discourse.

Research on the use of language in the English teaching classroom, particularly in Nepal, is still uncommon at the moment. Fairclough (2013) asserted that all interaction has a sort of power that can be exposed through the use of critical discourse analysis. As long as there are interactions between teachers and students, the phenomenon of using power in the classroom cannot be avoided. The influence of teachers' actions or words on students' learning attitudes is increasingly considered to be a form of power in the classroom. Based on these circumstances, it would be interesting to learn more about

how language and authority are used in English language teaching (ELT) settings, especially when directive speech acts are included.

### **Research Method**

The principles of qualitative research are applied to this study. As defined by Cresswell and Poth (2016) a qualitative study is a type of educational research where the researcher uses participant opinions to answer broad, general questions, gathers participant data primarily in the form of words, describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased way.

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of power language use in the classroom. The ethnographic method was used in this study by the researcher to examine the behavior patterns among teachers in the classroom and within the school community. Ethnographic research is utilized in the field of education to analyze how teachers and students behave, what they need, how they interact, and how they use language. Latief (2018) mentioned that ethnographic research is used to describe educational systems, processes, and phenomena to comprehend the needs, experiences, viewpoints, and goals of both teachers and students. This understanding serves as a useful basis for creating educational programs that will ultimately enhance the quality of student learning.

The teaching and learning activities carried out in the English language teaching classroom in the Nawalparasi district of

Nepal served as the research's primary source of data. Based on gender, position, and duration of the job, four public school teachers (two male and two female) were chosen. Observation, field notes, and research journals with interview transcripts were used to gather and analyze the data.

### **Finding and Discussion**

Based on information gathered from questionnaires, interviews, observations in the classroom, and videos of classroom activities, the study described how teachers used language to use power and influence students' attitudes toward learning.

### **Power Forms in Language Represented in Speech Acts**

The power represented by a teacher can be seen from his/her utterances in speech act forms. A teacher's use of directive speech acts can be used to determine the level of authority that person represents. Harnish (2009) urged that directed utterances indicate the speaker's attitude toward some anticipated action by the listener and his purpose that the utterance or the attitude is expressed, be understood as a justification for the hearer's behavior. The teacher frequently uses directed speech acts in class conversation to control the environment of the group. When doing these activities, the instructor frequently employs a power, which may take the form of high restrictions, a standard, or a low (humanistic) form. So, it will reveal how a teacher perceives his or her position concerning the students. The following transcript of teacher and student interactions illustrates the use of directive

speech acts.

Teacher: Listen carefully, and open page No. 67. Read the passage given on this page and when you are doing the exercises given below in the text, you have to (1) understand the passage thoroughly.

Student 1: Page No. Sir.

Teacher: Haven't you listened (2) earlier when I told you?

Student 1: Sorry sir, I haven't listened.

The conversation depicts an example in which a teacher was directing students on how to respond to inquiries. The students are asked to justify their responses. When viewed from the perspective of a command, it can be categorized as a directive speech act by the use of the modalities "have to" (1), and another "haven't" in turn (2). So, the authority a teacher possesses in the classroom can be understood from their intention to impose strict rules. It is evident from the relational modality "have to." It can be assumed that the teacher viewed both herself and her pupils in the context of a superior-subordinate relationship when she says "Haven't you listened earlier?". By employing the modality "have to," the speaker expected that the listener would follow their instructions. When giving instructions in a classroom setting regarding issues that are thought to be urgent, teachers often utilize direct directives that demonstrate the dominant power.

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Teacher: When you are doing the comprehensive exercises, try to understand the meaning of the words that you use (1). (The teacher moves around the class and asks one of the students)

Teacher: Have you finished (2)?

Student: No, Madam.

The teacher's authority is shown by the directed speech acts that are being used (1) (2). The teacher told her class to write down a text, they needed to comprehend the words they used. Students had to comprehend the significance of the text material, much like when they were reading a text. The teacher gave students ideas or suggestions in a direct speaking act to help them understand what they wrote or read. The teacher probably wanted to relate her experience so that the students would adopt her habits.

In the setting of the classroom, the teacher held the authority as a legitimate authority, a referent, and an expert. Thomas (1995) defined legitimate authority as the power obtained through a role, age, or rank. Such power is the authority someone acquires as a result of the admiration and desire others have for them. The power that a person gains due to his or her knowledge or talents is known as expert power. In the exchange described above, it is clear that the teacher had legitimate authority because she or he has a higher social standing than the students. The teacher wanted to be respected by her students because she wanted them to imitate her actions. It's referred to as

a referent power. Since she served as a repository of knowledge, the teacher in the most recent instance possessed expert authority.

Teacher: Now, have you completed it? Who wants to share the answer? (1)

Student: Contact...contact means...to put a relation... with somebody else. (2)

Teacher: Put relation with somebody? (3) Can you give an example? (4)

Student: For this problem contact the head teacher. (5)

Teacher: Good

The conversation started when the teacher asked the class a question. No one, however, dared to respond to the query. The teacher then asked, "Have you completed? Who wants to share the answer?" to get the students to respond. It is possible to conclude that the instructor wants the pupils to participate actively in class. The teacher made an effort to avoid becoming overbearing. The responses did not come from the students until the teacher asked for them. It may have contributed to the children's anxiousness when responding to the teacher's inquiry. One of the pupils was finally prepared to respond, despite his apparent nervousness, which was evident in his repeated words and vibrating sound. (2). In response (3), the teacher confirmed the student's response and asked the student to provide an additional justification



with supporting sentences. The teacher translated the student's supporting sentence into Nepali after the student had finished speaking. The teacher praised the student for the correct response by saying, "Good."

Responses to the teacher's stimulation or inquiries reveal how engaged the pupils are in the content of the class. The students still experience fear despite having the opportunity to participate in class activities. Typically, they will awkwardly respond to a teacher's question. The variables that contribute to students' nervousness in the classroom may come from their perceptions of the subject and the teacher. The teacher's request, "Can you give an example?" which is essentially a type of directive speech act, served as the example of power in the discussion above. In this instance, it is clear that a teacher may accidentally exercise power in the classroom.

### **Impact of Teachers' Use of Authority in Language on Students' Attitudes**

According to the aforementioned statistics, power manifestations occur not only in political activity but also in academic engagement. A teacher will typically use words to exert authority over the class since they are legally entitled to do so. The exercise of power by teachers in the classroom includes setting rules before, during, and after the teaching and learning process, allocating speaking time in class, managing the subject matter of instruction, and more. Additionally, the power of the instructor extends beyond the creation of regulations to their public utterances.

Because of their position of authority in the classroom, teachers can influence their student's attitudes toward learning.

The study's findings illustrated how language use for social roles was used throughout classroom teaching and learning activities involving teacher and student interaction. The way teachers interacted with students revealed how they felt about their students' perspectives. A teacher's responsibilities in the classroom extend beyond only serving as a source of knowledge to include managing the teaching and learning process. It indicates that a teacher is in a position of greater authority and power than the students they are teaching. The teacher's actions that involve directive speech acts can be used as a form of control in the classroom.

Discussions often involve the teacher using assertive power in the classroom. Students may become confused if there are disagreements between their opinions when it comes to answering questions or debating a subject. Their disagreements should be resolved through mediation by the teacher, who serves as a facilitator in the classroom. As a result, the range of conversational acts displayed by the students may be more limited, with a significantly greater proportion of their moves having the function of responding to teacher requests, as Salder and Mogfors-Bevan (1997) maintain due to an imbalance of power relationships between teacher and students in such a context.

In this aspect, Foucault is less interested

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in thinking that a powerful person in an institutionalized relationship is indeed all-powerful and more interested in the manner in which people negotiate power relationships. For instance, in an academic setting, there is a definite separation between the powerful (teachers) and the helpless (students) when teachers talk with their students. Those who are not in economically powerful positions, in particular, may nonetheless be able to negotiate a pretty powerful position in the hierarchy through their verbal dexterity and use of language (Mills, 2011). Similarly, Manke (1997) shows that in school, students do not passively obey their position and speak right, since they have different agendas to the teacher. For him, both the teachers and students in school recognize the others' agenda and priorities, and even though the teacher is the one who is ultimately in control, students need to shape the way that lessons proceed.

Additionally, persons who have positions of power may need to exercise sensitivity in how they negotiate the use of their authority and may need to minimize the types of direct orders that they deliver. For instance, a stereotypical perception of the power dynamic between a student and teacher would result in the interaction shown below.

Teacher: I want this homework done by tomorrow.

Student: Yes sir.

Here, the instructor makes it clear through his speech that he holds a privileged

position in the student's life that gives him authority and allows him to give the pupil direct orders. The student will also show the teacher that she recognizes her status as inferior by complying with her instructions. It is much more typical for the instructor to show deference to the student, and for the student to show strong resistance to the teacher's wishes. Here is an illustration of another interaction.

Teacher: I wonder (1) ...er... could you possibly (2)... you know(3)... this homework here on page no. 17... could that be done by tomorrow?

Students: Ok, we've got lots of homework... but we suppose (4).

Teacher: Oh, try these too.

Here, the teacher displays signs of powerlessness, hesitating, hedging (1) (2) (3), and even avoids stating explicitly his command; he only asks if they could the exercise of page no. 17. The students do not answer in affirmative; instead, they replay the teacher about their busy schedule of homework; implicitly stating their conditions. Even here, the students do not say that they will willingly do the homework, for they only say 'we suppose' (4). The students cannot refuse to undertake the task. It is not implied that teachers always hold the position of power; rather, it is suggested that individuals who have been given powerless positions within a hierarchy negotiate with their positions and acquire power through their apparent persuasive communication styles, while

those in positions of power use apparent subservient communication styles to influence others to perform tasks for them (Diamond, 1996).

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study showed that the interaction between the teacher and students during the teaching-learning process was a kind of language used for social roles. How teachers interacted with students revealed the teacher's perspective on their situation. In the classroom, the responsibilities of an instructor go beyond only imparting knowledge and managing the teaching-learning process. It denotes that a teacher in a classroom is in a position of greater authority and power than the students. The way a teacher exercises control in a classroom can take the shape of teacher utterances that include directive speech acts. The application of speech acts can have a powerful effect in the classroom since, in essence, they cause students to follow their teachers' intentions.

When classroom discourse was observed, a teacher frequently utilized directive speech acts to keep the class under control. In the classroom, the teacher displayed directive acts such as commands, requests, prohibitions, permissions, advice, and request forms. When performing these activities, a teacher portrayed that the degree of constraint on the power form might be high, standard, or low (humanistic). As a result, it should be presented how a teacher perceived the status of their students. The command act was very restricted because

there were implications for students who disobeyed the directive. When seen from the perspective of the teacher and student relationship, this power demonstrated that the teacher held a more important position than the students.

A teacher manifests power in the classroom during the teaching and learning process, whether consciously or unconsciously. It will have some effects on how students approach learning. A teacher can use directive speech acts to express their authority in the classroom discourse. The purpose of using directive speech actions is to persuade students to take action. The implications of directive speech acts toward students affect different views of students to the teacher's status in giving commands and students are not brave enough to utter honestly to refuse the teacher's command. Students' attitudes toward learning can be influenced by a teacher's implementation of authority through speech acts. They consequently don't pay close attention to what the teacher says. Students love following directions from their teacher since they think it's normal. The student's attitude toward learning is unaffected when the teacher requests class.

Since the students believe that the teacher's restriction is required, the teacher's prohibition has an impact on the students' attitudes. If the students violate the rule, there are penalties. For the teacher, it serves as a means of disciplining students.

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